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SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: SALINAS REAPPOINTED AS PRESIDENT OF INTUR

REF: A) MANAGUA 2442 B) MANAGUA 452 C) MANAGUA 341

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Ortega reappointed Mario Salinas as President of the Nicaraguan Tourism Institute (INTUR) on November ¶23. Since Salinas' departure from INTUR in June, the institute had been paralyzed, offering no strategic vision or support to the sector. Tourism experts and businessmen have welcomed Salinas' reappointment. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On November 23 President Ortega reappointed real estate developer Mario Salinas as the Executive President of the Nicaraguan Tourism Institute (INTUR). Salinas left INTUR in June reportedly because of policy and management conflicts with former Intur Vice-President Nubia Arcia (ref A). Ninette Marcenaro, who is currently Vice-President of INTUR and has been serving as Acting President since August, will remain as Vice President.

¶3. (SBU) Since Salinas' departure in June, INTUR has been paralyzed, offering no strategic vision or support to the tourism sector. In addition, INTUR lost most of its institutional expertise and management as approximately 60 professional staffers were either purged for FSLN party loyalists or quit to pursue other employment opportunities with less stress and uncertainty. Industry experts and businesspeople told Econoffs that institutional problems and lack of expertise among new staff members has prevented INTUR from actively promoting Nicaragua's tourism sector, approving projects, compiling statistical data, or offering a strategic vision for the industry.

¶4. (U) Businesspeople and industry experts welcomed the reappointment of Salinas because he is an entrepreneur involved in the sector who understands their concerns, and has a strategic vision to promote Nicaragua's tourism industry (Ref B). They are optimistic that Salinas will rebuild the expertise and professionalism INTUR needs.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The reappointment of Salinas as President of INTUR provides a ray of hope for the tourism sector in 2008. Industry insiders consider 2007 a lost year (Ref C). Other entrepreneurs hope that the paralysis at INTUR would serve as a good lesson for the Ortega administration; that is, not to put politics above pragmatism. End Comment.

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